

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia: Role of trust in an open system

Srinivas Gunta

Fellow Student, Indian Institute of Management
Bangalore



**The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:
Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)**
Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



Trust

- Is being increasingly viewed as important for success of organizations.
- Open systems are increasingly being researched to understand what holds them together.
- Trust as the primary adhesive.
- What is trust?
 - Adopting a TCE (Transaction Cost Economics) perspective in defining trust as one which reduces transaction costs.



Wikipedia & the English Wikipedia

- *“Possibly the greatest idea of the Computer Age”* — BritishWebWorld magazine
- *“The problem is in the way the Wikipedia has come to be regarded and used; how it's been elevated to such importance so quickly.”* — Jaron Lanier in *The Edge*
- The largest of all Wikipedias
- Over 60% of Wikipedia audience hops on to the English Wikipedia
- Over a million articles
- Over a million registered users



Administrators

- Less than thousand administrators
- Equipped with additional tools for maintenance
- Compared to (s)electing, recall is tougher
- Hence, very stringent norms in place for selecting an administrator; a well-defined process
- The process is known as Requests for Adminship.



Objectives of the presentation

- The RfA process on the English Wikipedia – as a vehicle to understand the role of trust
- Tracing evolution to RfA
- Identifying patterns of trust in RfA
- Pointers to strengthening RfA process through literature review
- Informing research community through the study of RfA
- Extend to open systems and beyond



Evolution to RfA

- Early days: Any good user is given
 - Adminship is no big deal - Jimbo Wales
- Decisions are made on the mailing list
- Formal process of RfA
 - Two ways – self-nom or others’ nom
 - Others’ nom → more credence for significant “others”
 - Nomination & answer to questions followed by discussion / poll
 - Additional questions
 - Oppose voters giving diffs



Standards, tweaks and alternatives

➤ Voting standards

- Edit countitis
- Age countitis
- Edit summaryitis

➤ Tweaks

- Admin coaching
- DfA

➤ Alternatives

- Scripts such as pop-ups, Vandalproof etc.
- Requests for Rollback

Trust operationalized

- McEvily, Bill, Vincenzo Perrone and Akbar Zaheer (2003). Trust as an Organizing Principle. *Organization Science*, 14(1), 91-103.
 - Structuring pathway: Developing, maintenance and modification of a system; it leads to patterns
 - Mobilizing pathway: Converting resources into finalized activities performed by independent actors; it leads to processes.
- Generic; not applicable to an open system

➤ Additional layer of TCE for clarity

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



What are transaction costs?

- Simply put, the costs of transacting.
- What costs constitute transaction costs?
 - Search costs
 - Contracting costs
 - Monitoring costs
 - Enforcement costs

Dyer, Jeffrey H. (1997). Effective Interfirm Collaboration: How firms minimize transaction costs and increase transaction value. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 535-556.

- Trust as a mechanism to reduce transaction costs.

...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity Common third party | Enhanced performance | Group think |

...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | Group similarity Common third party | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>“per above” votes</i> |

...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | Common 3 rd party | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |

...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | Common 3 rd party | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |

...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | Common 3 rd party | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |
| Delayed reciprocity & stability | A long term view | Enabling of serial equity | Continuity in the relation solely on the basis of outstanding obligations |

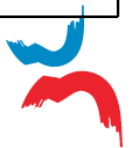
...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---|---|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity Common 3 rd party | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>“per above” votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |
| Delayed reciprocity & stability | A long term view | Enabling of serial equity | Continuity in the relation solely on basis of outstanding obligations |
| <i>Acceptable Behavior, edit summaries etc.</i> | | <i>Desirable actions such as removing user boxes etc.</i> | <i>There is a cabal.</i> |

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---|---|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity Common 3 rd party | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |
| Delayed reciprocity & stability | A long term view | Enabling of serial equity | Continuity in the relation solely on basis of outstanding obligations |
| <i>Acceptable Behavior, edit summaries etc.</i> | | <i>Desirable actions such as removing user boxes etc.</i> | <i>There is a cabal.</i> |
| Role specialisation & non-redundancy | Each member with competence in his domain | Efficiency criterion | ----- |

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



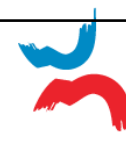
...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---|---|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity Common 3 rd party | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |
| Delayed reciprocity & stability | A long term view | Enabling of serial equity | Continuity in the relation solely on basis of outstanding obligations |
| <i>Acceptable Behavior, edit summaries etc.</i> | | <i>Desirable actions such as removing user boxes etc.</i> | <i>There is a cabal.</i> |
| Role specialisation & non-redundancy | Each member with competence in his domain | Efficiency criterion | ----- |
| <i>Activity areas</i> | | <i>e.g. Efficient in image space, vandal fighting, AFD, RC patrol</i> | <i>e.g. Project space edits, Main name space edits, User talk edits</i> |

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



...trust along the structuring pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---|---|
| Structuring - Development, maintenance & modification of systems | | | |
| Transferability & Density | Group membership Group similarity Common 3 rd party | Enhanced performance | Group think |
| <i>Non self-nom</i> | | <i>Easier to vote</i> | <i>"per above" votes</i> |
| Generative capacity & multiplexity | Same tie, lots of transfers | Good knowledge about competencies of partners | Local search (i.e. within ties) may be sub-optimal |
| <i>Nominating someone</i> | | <i>Shared experiences</i> | <i>Admin pool not expanded</i> |
| Delayed reciprocity & stability | A long term view | Enabling of serial equity | Continuity in the relation solely on basis of outstanding obligations |
| <i>Acceptable Behavior, edit summaries etc.</i> | | <i>Desirable actions such as removing user boxes etc.</i> | <i>There is a cabal.</i> |
| Role specialisation & non-redundancy | Each member with competence in his domain | Efficiency criterion | |
| <i>Activity areas</i> | | <i>e.g. Efficient in image space, vandal fighting, AFD, RC patrol</i> | <i>e.g. Project space edits, Main name space edits, User talk edits</i> |

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |

...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |
| <i>Diff provision even if it is marginally –ve</i> | <i>“Trust in nominator” votes</i> | <i>No need seen to expand effort in screening – No due diligence</i> |

...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |
| <i>Diff provision even if it is marginally -ve</i> | <i>“Trust in nominator” votes</i> | <i>No need seen to expand effort in screening – No due diligence</i> |
| Identifying & committing | Interdependence & common fate | Not-Invented-Here syndrome; Core rigidities |

...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |
| <i>Diff provision even if it is marginally -ve</i> | <i>“Trust in nominator” votes</i> | <i>No need seen to expand effort in screening – No due diligence</i> |
| Identifying & committing | Interdependence & common fate | Not-Invented-Here syndrome; Core rigidities |
| <i>Wikiprojects, Science articles, India-related articles</i> | <i>Collectivity is supported</i> | <i>Obscure areas not touched</i> |

...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |
| <i>Diff provision even if it is marginally – ve</i> | <i>“Trust in nominator” votes</i> | <i>No need seen to expand effort in screening – No due diligence</i> |
| Identifying & committing | Interdependence & common fate | Not-Invented-Here syndrome; Core rigidities |
| <i>Wikiprojects, Science articles, India-related articles</i> | <i>Collectivity is supported</i> | <i>Obscure areas not touched</i> |
| Suspending judgements & safeguarding | Reduction in transaction costs & increase in transacted value | Adverse selection & moral hazard |

...and along the mobilizing pathway

| <i>Pathway/ Event</i> | <i>Positive effect of trust</i> | <i>Negative effect of trust</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Mobilising - Converting resources into finalised activities to be performed by individuals | | |
| Disclosing, screening & knowledge sharing | Time compression; exploitation of knowledge already available in the community | Strategic blindness; inertia |
| <i>Diff provision even if it is marginally – ve</i> | <i>“Trust in nominator” votes</i> | <i>No need seen to expand effort in screening – No due diligence</i> |
| Identifying & committing | Interdependence & common fate | Not-Invented-Here syndrome; Core rigidities |
| <i>Wikiprojects, Science articles, India-related articles</i> | <i>Collectivity is supported</i> | <i>Obscure areas not touched</i> |
| Suspending judgements & safeguarding | Reduction in transaction costs & increase in transacted value | Adverse selection & moral hazard |
| <i>Benefit of doubt votes – low activity levels or very old bad behavior</i> | <i>Adminship is no big deal</i> | <i>Wheel warring</i> |

The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:

Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)

Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



Other ponderables

- Adminship as a badge of recognition
- Is this a private model?
 - Users themselves innovate / organize
- Is this a collective model?
 - Markets – Do they fail here?
 - Group strength – Is it limited?
 - Stringent recruiting – limited to RfA

von Hippel, Eric and Georg von Krogh
(2003). Perspective: Open Source Software and the 'Private-Collective' Innovation Model: Issues for Organization Science. *Organization Science*, 14(2), 209-223.



Contributions

- Pointers to strengthening RfA process – Delayed reciprocity & stability
 - Sub-optimal for a network member but optimal for the network
- Informing theory: Negative effects of trust on role specialization and non-redundancy
- Viewing the RfA process through the “trust” lens
- Extendable to other open systems – similarity
- Extendable beyond open system – more degrees of freedom



Thank You



**The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:
Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)**
Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



Thank You

Comments?



**The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:
Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)**
Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.



Thank You

Comments? Suggestions!



**The process of Requests for Adminship on the English Wikipedia:
Role of trust in an open system by *Srinivas Gunta* (IIMB)**
Wikimania-2006, Harvard Law School, 4th – 6th August, 2006.

